The Mayor's Task Force on Urban Theatres

Report to Kevin H. White, Mayor

August 4, 1975

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Mayor's Task Force on Urban Theatre

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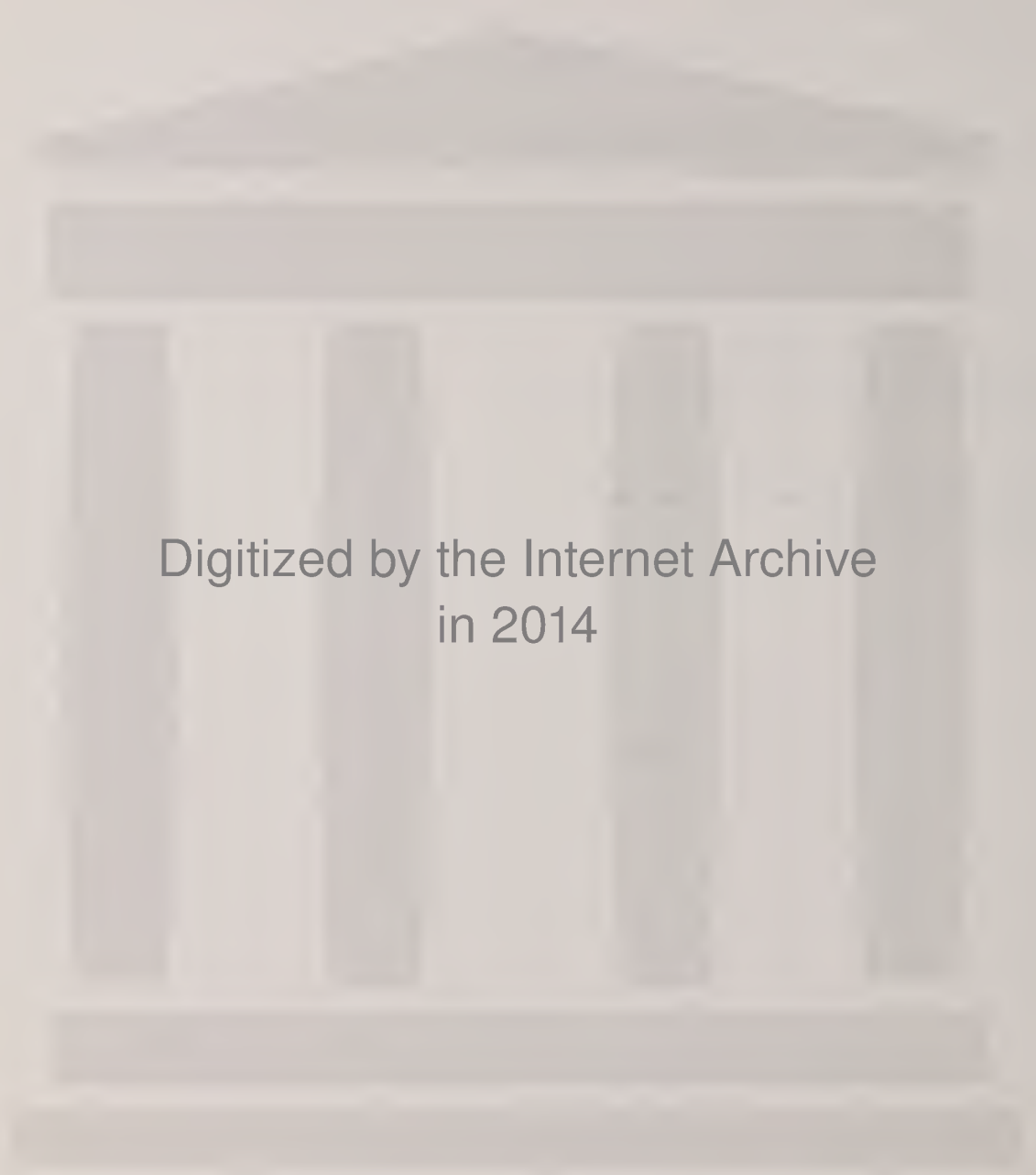
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Draft Recommendations for Action to

Kevin H. White, Mayor

The Task Force on Urban Theatre addressed itself to three primary areas of concern:

1) the safety of the theatre district;
2) the environment of the theatre district; and
3) the cost of maintaining the theatre district presently and in the future.

The recommendations contained in this report have been made within the following five areas of responsibility:

1) responsibilities of the City of Boston and departments therein;
2) responsibilities of the theatre owners;
3) responsibilities of producers;
4) responsibilities of the media; and
5) audience development.

I. SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT

A. Police Visibility

The safety and environment of the theatre district are the major areas of concern in regard to the City's responsibilities. The outcry from both theatre owners and producers, as well as from the patrons concerning the harassment by local street life of employees and patrons, has been heard by the Task Force. The Task Force has discussed at great length the problem of protecting physically, if not visually, patrons and employees from this harassment. The Boston Police Department must be complimented for its cooperation to date in the implementation of mounted police units in the area. The Task Force recommends that mounted patrol be extended to cover the hours from 6:00 P.M. each evening until 2:00 A.M. in the morning to protect not only patrons in the district but also the employees of the theatres and other establishments until after they have left their businesses or theatres.

B. Street Lighting

The Task Force has also agreed that high intensity street lighting is important, not only in consideration of safety, but also in terms of the environment. The Task Force would like to thank Mr. Casazza, Public Works Commissioner, for his demonstrated support in this area. He and his department have made a great effort to the best of their present funding and availability to install new lights in the area. The Task Force would like to recommend that as additional resources present themselves, that every effort be made to continually upgrade the lighting in the theatre district. We emphasize the recommendation that the intensity of lighting around all urban theatres be increased and standardized to an optimum degree, and additionally recommend that all alleyways in the theatre district be lit at a high intensity.

C. Sanitation

In the area of sanitation, the Task Force recommends that a full-scale cleanup project be undertaken in the theatre district by all parties concerned, i.e. the city, owners, and producers. Clearly, the first step in this project is a designation and agreement between parties of who owns and controls what, and who is responsible for sanitation. The Task Force has found that there are many grey areas in this responsibility presently. In many cases, discrepancies have been found between owners and the City as to who owns and is responsible for sanitation of certain parcels presently in disgraceful upkeep. The Task Force feels very strongly that the City should take the lead in beginning cleaning projects in the theatre district specifically.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY CITY DEPARTMENTS

It is clear that it is the City's responsibility to insure an inviting environment, and general sanitation will consist of the following:

1) a proliferation of attractive litter containers mounted on poles and at street corners with a unifying design, which would help identify the area as a theatre district;

2) distinctive "Cushman Carts" with properly uniformed personnel be provided on a full-time/long term basis at and by agreement with the Public Works Department of the City of Boston and the theatre owners;

3) additionally, because the area to which we refer is a high-traffic, high-pedestrian area (which would increase if we are successful), the routine maintenance by Public Works Department sanitation crews and of facilities should be more frequent. To be specific, we recommend that the total area be cleaned thoroughly during the night, as well as during the day;

4) the Task Force urges that the Boston Redevelopment Authority clean up the area around HUB Ticket Agency, which the Task Force finds in deplorable and abject condition. While the Task Force is aware that the HUB Ticket Agency is scheduled for demolition, we feel strongly that, since no target date has been set, the building, as well as all other Boston Redevelopment Authority owned buildings in that area, must, in the interim, be cleaned up to aid in the beautification of the theatre district.

5) on a quarterly basis, the number of man hours of police and sanitation crews should be submitted to the office of Cultural Affairs.

Strong concern has been voiced for a visually cohesive and artistic environment in the theatre district. The City of Boston indicated that it would cooperate in this endeavor.

D. Urban Renewal

It is the feeling of this Task Force that while the plans for the Music Hall are ambitious and commendable (as are the plans for Park Plaza), they are years away from realization. The actions of the City and the Boston Redevelopment Authority must not wait or be in any way dependent upon these plans. There are immediate clean up needs. The HUB Ticket Agency relocation, must proceed, no less important, the Theatre Park must be completed. It is the strong recommendation of the Task Force that the proposals that pertain to Stuart and Tremont Streets be completed within 6 months, and that Arts Ticket Service in some way be included in the environment of the Theatre Park.

E. MBTA Subway Involvement

It is also recommended by this Task Force that plans be made to include both the proposed "Music Hall" and "Boylston" subway stations in the visual and artistic environment.

F. Combat Zone

The Task Force recognizes the existence of a Combat Zone and recognizes that the removal of the Combat Zone is a number one priority. (The Task Force realizes it does not have the force to move the Combat Zone, but feels it can observe it and comment on it.) The Task Force also recognizes that the atmosphere of the Combat Zone is antithetical to first class family entertainment, including legitimate theatre and motion pictures. The Task Force recognizes that the upgrading of the area and thus the removal of the Combat Zone are long term goals of the City. In the meantime, the area must be cleaned up as much as possible;

e.g. building facades must be renovated. This will insure maximum protection and a more pleasant environment for those visiting the theatres as long as the Combat Zone exists in that location.

G. Law Enforcement

The Task Force has heard from all quarters on the issues of law enforcement. The Task Force has inspected various methods, practices and operations of not only our city, but also of other cities, i.e. New York, Washington, Los Angeles. While it is apparent that the "Combat Zone" and the theatre district are going to be neighbors for some time, it is important that law enforcement be kept as strict as possible.

1. Enforcement

It is a strong recommendation of this Task Force that the laws regarding the conduct of individuals, property owners and entertainers in the area known as the "Combat Zone" be properly and realistically enforced. While the Task Force is aware that this area will not always be serving the public's interest, we are aware that actions unacceptable to community standards have been committed within bars throughout this area. Arrests have to be made and penalties invoked. Violations of city, state and federal codes should be reported to the proper authorities such as the Alcoholic Beverage Commission and the Licensing Board which issue licenses to these establishments. We look favorably on your recent statements concerning this issue. We are suggesting strongly that activities in this area be contained at a tolerable level, so that theatre-goers are not harassed and that they are given reasonable assurance that the actions of the adult entertainment area will be within community standards.

2. Penalties

It is the feeling of the Task Force that increases should be made in penalties for violations of any sort that occur within the theatre district, e.g. it is apparent that a $25.00 fine for the crime of prostitution

in no way serves as a deterrent to the business of prostitution, and that it should be increased to a $200.00 fine. In conjunction with prostitution, we also strongly recommend that consumers of prostitution or "johns" be arrested with equal vigor, thereby discouraging the demand.

3. Vehicle Control

In a lesser sense, law enforcement also includes the ticketing of parked vehicles. The Task Force, after hearing numerous complaints concerning the ticketing of cars belonging to patrons who simply step inside theatres to get tickets for performances, recommends the inception of a 10-minute parking zone in front of theatres to make box offices more accessible to patrons. It is difficult enough to get tickets in Boston without adding insult to injury with a $5.00 or $10.00 parking ticket, thereby adding to the expense of an evening at the theatre.

H. Agency Supervision

It is the feeling of the Task Force that the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs is the most able agency, given the authority and resources, to hold the reins on other city departments to create a law enforceable visually cohesive, and artistic environment and to pursue its implementation. It is felt that the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, through the community as well as through professional contacts in the arts, can provide a platform upon which we can improve out theatre district.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that the Mayor appoint an official from the police department, sanitation department, BRA, and the City law department to work with the Office of Cultural Affairs to insure that the recommendations that are accepted by the Mayor are properly implemented.

The City of Boston represented on this Task Force has given every assurance that continued support of this project will be provided to the best of their authority and resources. It is for you, Mr. Mayor, to back your representatives on the Task Force with your support.

II. COOPERATIVE INVOLVEMENT OF PRODUCERS, THEATRE OWNERS AND MEDIA

A. Producers

The producers were responsible in a great degree for the formation of this Task Force. They have much to gain from a successful experience. Therefore we call upon them to outline what their plans are for the improvement and expanded use of the City of Boston as a "try-out" and "road show" city. We feel that the role of the producers (local and international), as a result of this improved environment, should be to provide the City of Boston with more and better productions. We expect the producers to:

1. spend a reasonable amount of money on promotion and production;

2. improve the theatre visually, for each production, i.e. graphics, gala openings, etc.;

3. improve public and press relations;

4. experiment with longer Boston runs;

5. place casting notices in Boston newspapers for productions being cast in New York which will appear in Boston. This way, Boston talent will have the opportunity to audition for productions. It is our thought that "hometown" talent might spur an audience attraction to the theatres as well as promote the general interests of Boston's smaller companies which are playing an increasing role in the City's audience development;

6. cooperate closely with the communication's. Print and visual media in the Boston area should be expanded. The media and other interested parties should be appraised of the upcoming theatre season as early as possible. Producers are also encouraged to promote Boston theatres in their circles. Only by increased use and visibility can more and better productions come to Boston.;

7. insist upon (and encourage) their Public Relations agents to promulgate a code of professional ethics.

8. it is necessary that all producers in the United States be made aware of this report, so that they will be informed of the improved conditions in Boston. It is suggested that you, Mr. Mayor, extend an invitation to all producers to a luncheon for discussion of the Task Force findings and a request of the producers to bring a list of the plays they are planning, where they will take them, and if not Boston, why not.

B. Theatre Owners

Very closely related to the producer is the theatre owner. The Task Force has talked at great length about the differences between the two. In simple terms, the producer basically leases the theatre and local staff for a given run of a play. Thus, the owner is responsible for the physical and morale state of the theatre, more than anything else.

It is the task and responsibility of the owner to create a positive environment for a production from well-mannered box office personnel, to clean and attractive washrooms, to well-maintained stage equipment.

1. Theatres must be attractive, clean and exhibit an air of elegance. Uniformed or appropriately dressed doormen, ushers, maids and ticket takers should be instituted to reflect the distinctive visual aspect of the theatre district. It is recommended that the box office personnel be polite and informative, and that theatre owners should commit themselves to operate a positive ambiance for all customers of the Boston theatres.

2. The Task Force also recommends that the theatres commit funds for external visual improvements to aid in the physical delineation of the theatre district.

3. The Task Force wishes to re-emphasize the importance of work between the Boston Department of Public Works and the theatre owners on cooperative projects such as the leasing of street sweepers for general sanitation of the district. The Task Force thanks Mr. Schoenfeld of the Shubert organization of the giving of two Cushman Carts for the theatre district.

4. The Task Force also recommends that theatre owners jointly hire a Public Relations person or persons to promote the theatre district as a whole, both locally and nationally, to let people across the country know of our new and exicting theatre district.

5. It is the responsibility of the theatre owners to try to arrange theatre packages with restaurants and parking facilities, and to, perhaps, place cards at dining tables to encourage audience development.

6. It should be noted that the Task Force recommended, some weeks ago, that theatres leave their outside lights on until 1:00 A.M. and that this has met with some success in the cutting down of street crime in the district after closing time.

C. Media

The Task Force feels that the media has a general responsibility to inform the public, through every possible means, of this report and the

accomplishments of the Task Force. It is up to the media and its representatives to promote positive response in the general public.

Recommendations to the media include:

1. a request that TV stations' management advise the Mayor of plans, in light of the fact the 7 1/2 more hours of news have been scheduled for the Fall, to allot an adequate amount of this time to theatres in Boston - comparable to coverage in the rest of the nation. Basically, the Task Force is recommending that "arts" coverage be increased in general.

2. We feel that the media should insist upon the enforcement of a good public relations code of professional ethics.

3. The Task Force recommends that every media representative involved in the arts support the Boston 200's Theatre Month project this October. This Task Force will help in every way it can to see that maximum visibility is given to the theatres and the theatre district.

III AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

A. The Task Force urges that every tool of audience development be used. The Task Force endorses efforts of the newly organized ARTS TICKET SERVICE/ BOSTON, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and Massachusetts Council on the Arts & Humanities, and directed by Peter Kellogg. This project will be in full stride in late October 1975. The Task Force understands that this project will take time to fully establish itself. However, similar projects have met with great success in other cities with similar problems, such as Buffalo and New York City.

B. The Task Force recommends that Arts Ticket Service/Boston and all other groups and agencies be helped by the City, the producers, the theatre owners, the state and federal arts council, and by private sector to secure the audience for the future.

C. The Task Force recommends that an on-going function of interested members of this committee be to increase the number of ticket subscriptions to guarantee longer runs, greater variety and frequencey of performances.

The underlying theme of the Task Force has been that by improving the area, more productions will be attracted to Boston, more and better actors will therefore come to Boston, more producers will be interested in Boston, and as a result, more people will be attracted to attend the theatre in Boston.

As a final recommendation, the Task Force strongly urges that a Review Board be established by you, Mr. Mayor, to meet monthly for twelve months and report to you, Mr. Mayor, on the progress of the recommendations. Clearly, it should also be the responsibility of this Review Board to monitor new and potential problems in the theatre district.